

ADEPT Political Commentaries

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Republica Moldova - the country of projects, concepts, strategies...

3 September 2003

In his speech of August 27 on the Independence Day celebrations, President Voronin stated "Never was Moldova so close to the European processes". The significance of the message is better grasped if compared to the previous two speeches of 2001 and 2002 entitled "I do believe in Moldova's future" and "Independence is conditioned by the reintegration of the country".

Interestingly enough in all his three speeches the President compared nowadays realities in the Republic of Moldova to the soviet times. In 2001 President Voronin claimed that "Republic of Moldova sovereignty should have played a destructive role within the union state". Moreover, back then he believed that "breakdown storm took URSS nations by surprise".

One year later, in 2002, President's nostalgia for the soviet time was far less obvious in his speech. He stated "Each year we have some univocal feelings when celebrating Independence Day. The fate of our small country has proved to be too dramatic and the hardships we are going through too tough".

Although still doubtful, this year President is far more optimistic. Now he believes that "It is important for us to keep in mind that in the aftermath of 1991 August Putsch this path was chosen by all the former URSS republics. Independence was a common option, which probably had no other alternative". This points to an evolution in President's vision towards the independence of the country. However, the key word here is "probably". This probably leaves room for doubts and most importantly justifies the huge discrepancy between the President's calls in the last two years to liberalize economy and democratize the society in view of European integration and Communist Party's program, headed by the President himself, calling for "reestablishing Communist society" in line with Marxist-Leninist theory and rebuilding URSS.

Once we have reviewed the evolution in President's perception of the independence, let us consider the tasks outlined by the President for consolidating the country's independence. Thus back in 2001, implementing the "Republic of Moldova" project outlining the country's reintegration was a top priority. One year later in 2002 besides reunifying the country, corruption was added to the top priorities. As for 2003, country reunification is still a priority, however from a totally different perspective. Nowadays' message - European integration "is the most reliable tool for securing the country's integrity". Therefore, new priorities are defined each year, while the old ones unfortunately haven't been accomplished.

It is worth considering what has been achieved so far in implementing the tasks outlined by the President. The goals of the "Republic of Moldova" project launched by the President in 2002 were outlined in his open letter to writer Ion Druta, i.e. edifying "Moldovan nation". This was to become the "integrating idea" consolidating a multi-ethnic society and enabling Transdnistria's integration to the Moldovan state. The intelligentsia was to promote this "integrating idea" among fellow citizens and young generation and make it accessible. Russian as the second state language and a

revised history course were to become the cornerstone of that project. Opposition responded to those initiatives by staging protest rallies for 4 months, which ended with a Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Resolution imposing a moratorium on any revision of linguistic policy or history curricula. Things are still not clear. The most recent outcomes of the presidential initiative are: launching the concept of national policy, publishing a Moldovan-Romanian dictionary, and creation of a new Writers' Union, which supposedly would have to contribute to the enforcement of the plan. This time again opposition reacted promptly. Its leaders have already announced that they will resume the protest rallies by the end of the month. This is the logic of "settling once and for all" extremely delicate issues concerning ethnicity, language, history etc.

As for the other objectives outlined in the President discourse, the country reintegration has slowly degenerated into federalization of the country, which bears some risks. And this for the sole reason that at least the core principles for developing a federative Constitution were not defined. Going back to fighting corruption, it wasn't even mentioned in the President's speech, albeit things have considerably worsened in the field. After the establishment of "vertical power", there is probably no reason to fight corruption since all key public officers are on the same side, in the same party.

Under those conditions the governing has declared European integration as one of its strategic goals. However, there is a huge discrepancy between authorities' pro-European messages and their daily practices, fact confirmed by OSCE final report on negative trend in the electoral process of the Republic of Moldova.

One year ago, the President regretted the time wasted in promoting reforms since the country's independence. Indeed, Republic of Moldova has become the country of dozens of projects, concepts and strategies, a great majority of them being produced by the incumbent governing. However, none of the documents was completed in view of stability and prosperity of the country. This year only the governors adjourned three times the release of the European integration strategy. Moreover, the strategy degenerated into an eventual concept, which also wasn't and probably will never be made public. Now it is said the European Commission should be first consulted on the concept and only then it would serve for the elaboration of the strategy as such. We are well aware how long might the "consultation and elaboration" take, that is why the only thing for citizens to do is wait for new tasks for Moldovan society to be outlined in the future messages of the President.

Changes in the economic policy?

9 September 2003

Observers indicate that Government activity, especially of its economic bloc, would significantly improve after Marian Lupu was appointed as a Minister of Economy. He has the knowledge and experience qualifying him for this position. He represents the so-called "technocrats", skilled professionals for whom political orientation is of no great significance.

Nonetheless, Marian Lupu's appointment is not an indicator of some crucial changes in the Government economic policy, but rather of his predecessors' poor results. This was confirmed by the Minister himself in his interview to the governmental weekly "Moldova Suverana" on August 27 when stating that the priorities of the Ministry he was heading "are in line with the priorities outlined by the President of the country and his team in as far as the pro-active economic policy is concerned...". The Minister referred to the priorities lying ahead: liberal environment for production and trade; favorable environment that would boost economy, and attracting foreign investments.

The aforesaid tasks have been on the incumbent governing's agenda for the last two years. Noteworthy, in his address to the Parliament at the end of its first parliamentary session the President pointed that Republic of Moldova lacked a strategy and for it to happen economy liberalization was paramount. That address of summer 2001 greatly shocked the Communist majority faction, which had totally different tasks outlined in its political and electoral platform, namely building socialism and afterwards communism. From that moment on the President has been labeled as being "pragmatic", meaning that in taking decisions the President neglects official documents of the party and is rather guided by the need to survive on the political scene and stay in power.

Those liberal metamorphoses of the President had been preceded by Republic of Moldova joining WTO and Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe, paved by the previous ruling. At that time those events were viewed as a rather heroic act from the President given that the party press continued to libel the said institutions as tools for promoting the interests of NATO and American imperialism.

Relations with international monetary organizations have developed along the same path, as IMF and WB were also libeled two years ago as tools of American imperialism. Gradually, acknowledging the fact that the country is lacking a development strategy has been replaced by acknowledging the need to develop an Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRSP) in line with the WB recommendations. For PRSP to be properly implemented public administration should be modernized, stated President Voronin last year.

Former Minister of Economy, Stefan Odagiu, was responsible for the PRSP elaboration, which should have been completed by this March. The deadline hasn't been met. On top of that, it is believed that Minister Odagiu wasn't qualified enough to effectively negotiate with WB and IMF.

Therefore, one may say that Odagiu's replacement with Marian Lupu was part of the plan to "modernize public administration". The latter involves Cabinet reshuffle for which Deputy Minister, Vasile Iovv, was in charge. His track record already includes revising local public administration system implemented after this year local elections. Probably the governors realized that permanent reshuffle does no good to the state apparatus image. For instance the funds spent for revising public administration system would have sufficed by far for renovating the schools and raising the meager salaries of the public employees, as the trade unions demand.

That is why "modernization of the public administration" would resume only to changes in the structure of the Ministry of Economy, which according to the newly appointed Minister "should be tailored to the functional needs of regulating economy".

Minister of Economy outlined in detail the actions to be undertaken in order to achieve the aforesaid. In particular "fiscal burden should be diminished for the business to get out of the shadow economy". For this to happen "authorities' actions should become credible".

Interestingly enough, two years ago Prime Minister Tarlev said the very same things in his address to the businessmen congress. Nonetheless nothing has changed since. On the contrary, businessmen surveyed had even indicated that things worsened considerably lately. Moreover, businessmen repeatedly reported on increasing pressure from authorities, especially since the establishment of Department for Fighting Corruption and Organized Crime, which was overzealous lately in justifying its existence. On the other hand, for three years now Prime Minister Tarlev keeps announcing a campaign to fight smuggling of fuel. It's not clear what keeps Prime Minister from enforcing such measures, especially as reportedly they might bring a billion MDL to the state budget.

Having said that, enhancing "authorities' credibility" might become a long-term problem. Furthermore, potential investors know far too well how Moldovan authorities view strategic investors such as Union Fenosa and the like. On top of that, the recent nationalization of the "Dacia" hotel was very conclusive.

One of the top priorities identified by the newly appointed Minister is resume negotiations with IMF, as the suspension of its programs "hinders negotiations with Paris Club on restructuring the foreign debt". According to the Minister, it would be extremely difficult to maintain macroeconomic stability, which requires "a consolidation of the central administration efforts and mobilization of internal resources". Meanwhile, governors have identified two sources to cover its monetary needs - Central Bank loans and monetary emission without coverage. Financial analysts are already warning about the ever-growing inflation. As IMF ceased the funding, apparently authorities decided to settle their short-term problems without caring too much about impact they might have in the long run.

The new Minister is probably right when claiming that "we should not rush to complete the negotiations with IMF on the expense of the quality of the negotiated document, so that we might end up with issues and misunderstandings arising later on", however it is probably too late already. He also stated that "negotiations with

IMF should be tough on professional level and not on the psychological one". This might lead us to believe that so far things had been done totally opposite. If so this

should come as no surprise to anybody. The thing is that the President's recent liberal pragmatism may not automatically annul the dogmatism of his fellow party comrades. The latter are characterized by an extremely inert force, which might as well act in the opposite direction to the course outlined by the new Minister of Economy.

One step forward, two steps back...

6 October 2003

President Voronin's negative reaction to the establishment of the Single Economic Area (SEA) by Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Belarus has spurred some contradictory reactions among the Moldovan society. On the one hand, President Voronin's statement that SEA had undermined Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) existence and therefore Moldova stated that from now on Moldova would take firmer action towards the European Union brought hopes to opposition parties and press that the incumbent ruling party truly embarked upon European integration path and that it might even break away from CIS. Even media outlets affiliated to the ruling party indicated that they shared the same opinion.

On the other hand, notable figures within the ruling party expressed their reticence with regard to President's statements. Therefore, the President was forced to declare that domestic press misinterpreted his words with regard to the CIS future and the future of Moldova within CIS, for that matter. So, in the end the ruling party came back on track of its oscillating policies.

It is worth clarifying certain issues here. Firstly, opposition was suspicious over the pro-European statements made by President Voronin one year ago. The best test for the authorities to prove their pro-European intentions was suggested by the Christian-Democratic Peoples' Party, when last December they came up with the initiative of a consultative referendum for the people either to support European integration or oppose it. In doing so Christian-Democrats followed the logic that accession to EU should be preceded by some security guarantees, namely joining NATO. Apparently the referendum was intended to create a strong pro-European movement within the country, which would have compelled political elite to follow it without many hesitations.

Authorities' reaction to the Christian-Democrat's initiative was quite eloquent. On the one hand the referendum was thwarted on the grounds that, under the Constitution, Republic of Moldova is a neutral state. On the other hand it enjoyed mockery coverage in the governmental press on the grounds that referenda on joining EU are held only in the countries already accepted to the Union.

Therefore, Moldovan authorities proved to be guided by other logic than the one recently tested by the ten East European countries accepted to EU. Apparently Moldovan authorities do not make a difference between a consultative referendum aimed to endow a clear strategic goal to the domestic policies and a referendum aimed at approving EU membership, which has a legal effect.

This fact alone determined a wide skepticism towards the latest pro-European initiative of President Voronin. It seems that the pro-European initiative is only one element of a wider range of methods aimed at changing radically the negotiation format with Transnistrian leaders. The thing is that after two years in power, the Communist Party has understood that its plan to settle the Transnistrian conflict is not feasible within the old structure and negotiation format. To attract new parties interested in the settlement of the Transnistrian conflict, authorities came up with the idea of European integration. Let's take a closer look at the sequence of events. After

a series of meetings with Vladimir Putin, Moldovan President made an appeal to his Russian counterpart, on the Russian TV, to recall its citizen, Igor Smirnov, from the

eastern territories of the Republic of Moldova. Voronin's message was left without any answer, while the number of meetings between the two Presidents dropped. Then followed OSCE draft proposal on federalization of the Republic of Moldova, and a couple of months later President Voronin came up with the initiative of Moldova's integration in EU. To attenuate somehow his initiative, during the CIS Summit held in Chisinau in October 2002, President Voronin suggested the entire CIS to follow the European integration path. Later, following the decisions taken at the NATO Summit in Prague and EU Summit in Copenhagen, President Voronin notified EU officials on his pro-European intentions and several weeks later he visited Washington and where he was promised US support in settling the Transdnistrian conflict. Meanwhile Christian-Democrats initiative to conduct the aforesaid referendum was rejected. At the same time a wide campaign against the breakaway regime was launched on the international scale. Accusations to the Tiraspol regime have been voiced at the OSCE Summit in Porto, at the Council of Europe, at the UN, etc. Indeed the campaign had a visible effect, especially when the Dutch Foreign Minister launched the idea of EU involvement in the resolution of the Transdnistrian conflict. Interestingly, when it was time to seize those opportunities Moldovan side was hesitant, could only express its gratitude to OSCE and other guarantor countries - Russia and Ukraine, and condemn "nationalism and separatism" that had divided the Republic of Moldova.

One might deduce that what Moldovan authorities really wanted was just to make pressure on Russia without antagonizing it too much by means of international institutions interested in securing the future NATO and EU borders. Despite the tough pressure on it, with Russia's support Transdnistria managed each time to come up with "appropriate measures", as in the case of "economic and diplomatic blockade", "telephony war", etc. An illustration of the implicit pressure on Russia, which has its own interest zones in CIS, was the session convened by Prime Minister Tarlev to discuss the Conception of Moldova's EU integration held during the time of CIS Summit in Yalta. This session paved the way to the much-cited statement of President Voronin.

Russian political elite was rather sarcastic when commenting on the event, whereas President Voronin together with governmental press rushed into denial claiming that opposition parties and press misinterpreted his statement. This might indicate that President Voronin has probably exhausted his entire stock of maneuvers therewith he was trying to pass the message that he needs to be backed up in the standoff with Tiraspol, otherwise Chisinau might breakaway from "Russia's influence zone". This is an illustration of political calculation and desire to stay in power in their worse.

It thus has become clear that it is practically impossible to settle Transdnistrian conflict prior to the parliamentary elections, that is why electoral interests are taking center stage, whereas the much-promised resolution of the conflict by the end of the year - is adjourned until after 2005 elections. A simple calculation could show that the great majority of votes in favor of the Communist Party was cast by Russian speakers. According to the findings of opinion polls those citizens would rather go for CIS than EU. Meanwhile, the promises made by the ruling party on fighting corruption, settling Transdnistrian conflict, and poverty reduction are still not fulfilled. Moreover, given the worsening macroeconomic indicators the statement of the Minister of Economy that the foreign funding would not be resumed by 2005, i.e. after parliamentary elections, leaves room for speculations that Moldova is on the verge of a default, fact

confirmed by several economists, including those from the Communist faction in Parliament. This is not the end of bad news. A part of opposition is engaged in protest rallies, whereas the other is suspected of keeping liaison with Tiraspol regime and Russian authorities in order to win their support in the upcoming parliamentary elections. There are also some outstanding negative factors. One month ago Russian press alleged that President Voronin's son was supporting terrorists in Russia. Although there is probably little truth in those allegations, still they cannot be neglected.

As the electoral interests seem to take the center stage, the only option left for President Voronin is to radically change his message into a pro-CIS one, tactics already tested by his Belarus and Ukrainian counterparts. There are already some signals in this respect. Notable personalities within the Communist Party have already started reviving the idea of "Europe united as far as Ural". Things would probably clear up after Vladimir Putin's visit to Chisinau. Analysts believe that if the visit takes place, the parties would reach an agreement on withdrawal of Russian munitions and troops from the Eastern region of the Republic of Moldova. Most likely a Russian military base would be established in exchange for Russia's pledge to continue supporting the "settlement of the Transdnistrian conflict by observing Republic of Moldova's territorial integrity and sovereignty", principles promoted by the ruling party. Of course European integration would not be forgotten, it would happen when the entire CIS would be ready for it.

Political concord

13 October 2003

Almost one year after the draft on settling Transdnistrian conflict via federalization was made public in Kiev, the Head of OSCE Mission to Moldova stated that the elaboration of a compromise political Agreement is underway, which would allow for a complete resolution of the conflict.

This new approach is conclusive of the total failure of the previous approaches employed in dealing with the Transdnistrian conflict, or at best of their need of improvement. Indeed, there is only one document agreeable to Tiraspol leaders, namely the Memorandum signed in 1997, providing for the establishment of a single state by two equal subjects. This document was developed by the current pentagonal negotiation mechanism and was endorsed by Russia, Ukraine and OSCE. The draft on Republic of Moldova federalization was developed within the same framework and looks more like a draft Constitution of a federative state.

On the one hand, 1997 Memorandum is a very general document, in contrast the Kiev draft is more detailed. The strange thing is that nobody remembers now about the draft, moreover the parties involved in the conflict, engaged in developing a new federative Constitution without having an agreement in principle regarding the draft released in Kiev. Despite the general understanding that it was practically impossible to develop a Constitution without having first an agreement in principle over the structure of the future state, it was preferred to concentrate on details. It took almost a year of international seminars under the aegis of OSCE to reach this conclusion.

Apparently, the new initiative to develop a political Agreement has no chances of success. Normally, we should firstly answer the question "What shall we do with 1997 Memorandum and Kiev draft?" Transdnistria and Russia claim that the current negotiation format as well the documents already developed are acceptable and need no changes. Although committed to settle the conflict, Republic of Moldova leadership refrains from taking a clear stance, instead resorting to maneuvers and appealing to international institutions. There are a number of reasons for such a tactics, however the most important is the Basic Treaty Republic of Moldova signed with Russian Federation, entitling the latter to protect Transdnistrian regime in legal terms.

Consequently, it comes as no surprise that the ruling party rejected the discussion of an opposition Popular Party Christian Democratic (PPCD) draft statement on the failure of Russia to remove its troops from the Transdnister region. Communists, in the person of the Parliament Chair, Mrs. Ostapciuc, justified their decision by the fact that the motion procedures were not observed. On the other hand, the head of the Communist faction in Parliament, Victor Stepaniuc, who several years ago openly militated for examining the possibility of allowing Russian military basis in Transdnistria, justified the refusal to examine Christian-Democrats initiative by the Republic of Moldova's unwillingness to further complicate its foreign relations. Consequently, non-compliance with the motion procedures wasn't the real reason for rejection.

The funny thing is that Christian-Democrats' initiative was nothing but a sequel to the appeal to OSCE member-states to pressure Russia to comply with the decisions of the Istanbul and Porto OSCE Summits and withdraw its troops from Transdnistria by the end of 2002 and 2003 respectively. The ruling party rejected the initiative at the very time President Voronin publicly stated that at the next OSCE Summit in Maastricht Russia would have to report on the measures taken to enforce the aforesaid decisions. To put it differently, Republic of Moldova would like Russia to be pressured, however it does not want to be the target of its anger.

Meanwhile, the Chief of OSCE Mission to the Republic of Moldova, William Hill, indicated that "Russia would not be able to evacuate its munitions from Transdnistria within the set deadlines".

Technical and financial reasons are cited. These reasons seem to be true, however from a totally different perspective. Transdnistria demands its main supporter, Russia, to pay a reward for the permission to withdraw its own munitions from the Republic of Moldova. There is no doubt that the "financial litigation" between Russia and Transdnistria could go on forever under the Moldovan-Russian Basic Treaty. This fact does no good to the OSCE overall image, as it would have to extend for the third time the deadline for evacuating Russian munitions from the Republic of Moldova.

At the end of November expires Republic of Moldova's presidency over Council of Europe Ministerial Council. When in May Republic of Moldova took over the presidency, authorities made it clear they wanted to take advantage of that opportunity and take some measures in view of a faster resolution of the Transdnistrian conflict. During all kind of events held under the auspices of CE, as well as during various international forums, the President reiterated that one his top priorities as the head of state was settling the Transdnistrian conflict. Moreover, he condemned "separatism and nationalism", i.e. the separatist regime headed by Igor Smirnov and the nationalistic Christian-Democrat opposition. Authorities took the presidency very seriously and even made everything possible not to miss this opportunity. During one of the sessions of the Permanent Round Table the President confessed that it was very difficult for him to refrain from resorting to force against the protest rallies staged by the Christian-Democrats in January - April 2002.

As it stands now at the end of the presidency, it turns out that the resolution of the Transdnistrian conflict hasn't evolved too much, on the contrary it is stalled. Thus, the elaboration of the federalist Constitution, viewed as the last ditch in solving the conflict, has reached a deadlock. To sign a political agreement with Transdnistria, negotiations have to be start all over again. Moreover, Communist authorities, who had hoped after their victory in elections for a fast resolution of the conflict, faced the bitter reality - Transdnistria sees itself as an equal partner to the Republic of Moldova in laying the foundation of the "contractual federation" and it always comes up with "appropriate responses" to all the "coercive measures" taken by Chisinau. The on-going "telephony scandal" is a vivid illustration in this respect.

To secure that Moldova's presidency wouldn't to unnoticed, Moldovan permanent representative, Alexei Tulbure delivered a speech at Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers that unleashed a real diplomatic scandal. He brought serious accusations to Romania and invited Council of Europe to mediate between the two countries.

According to the allegations made on a contemptuous tone, which resembled much of the polemics between Turkish and Greek delegations in the European forums a couple of years ago, Romania was undermining Republic of Moldova sovereignty. Tulbure claims those actions included: Romania's refusal to sign a Basic Treaty with the Republic of Moldova; financial support provided by Romanian Government to pro-Romanian opposition in Moldova; protectionist policy against the Moldovan products at the time Republic of Moldova was confronted with severe economic problems; Romanian support in teaching Romanian language and history in Moldovan schools, thereby promoting xenophobia and anti-Semitism; Romania's negative opinion on the federalization of the Republic of Moldova.

In the opinion of the Moldovan side, all the aforesaid illustrate Romania's paternalist attitude towards Moldova, which in its turn leaves room for speculations to the Transdnistrian side on a would-be unification of the Republic of Moldova and Romania. Those speculations justify Transdnistria's uncompromising position in negotiations with Moldova. To put it differently, the failure to settle Transdnistrian

conflict stems from the Christian-Democrats' protest rallies and ultimately their supporter - Romania.

Apparently, Moldovan authorities pretend not to understand where the real cause lies, although Transdnistrian leaders' economic interests and the exorbitant money they make out of Transdnistria, have been frequently cited. Firstly, breakaway regime had never been short of arguments in justifying its existence. For instance, in early 90's it was preserving Communist and URSS values, precisely what the incumbent ruling party in Moldova is striving for. After the breakup of URSS Transdnistrian leaders proclaimed themselves defenders of Russian interests in the Balkans. Nowadays, Transdnistrian leaders defend the interests of the "Transdnistrian people" by privatizing the patrimony of the region and even the land. Today, Transdnistrian propaganda claims it has nothing to do with the "obsolete Communist regime" of the President Voronin. Having said that, one may only wonder in how far Moldovan authorities are sincere when asking Council of Europe to mediate between Chisinau and Bucharest in view of settling Transdnistrian conflict. Following the same logic, Council of Europe might be well invited to eradicate the "Communist regime" in the Republic of Moldova, which in Smirnov's opinion is undermining the negotiation process by avoiding direct contacts between the two parties.

However, Moldovan authorities do not accept such reasoning. What they prefer is the "asymmetric reasoning", which they applied on the one hand when accepting the current negotiation format and the 1997 Memorandum (providing for an equal status of Moldova and Transdnistria in creating a "joint state"), and on the other hand when they consistently plead for an "asymmetric federation". Transdnistrian side has all the reasons to believe that the "asymmetric federation" is nothing but an euphemism, thereby Transdnistria would be subordinated to Moldova. In this respect, they speculate first of all on the Communist authorities' manners in Gagauzia, especially when they incite hate and discord so as to eliminate top people in Gagauz administration and replace them with others more loyal to Chisinau ruling party. The latter is much more of an issue than the would-be unification with Romania. Under those circumstances, Moldovan opposition parties view as counterproductive or even dangerous the incoherent way Moldovan authorities play with federalization. This position was backed up by some Romanian officials as well, who are interested in securing their eastern borders.

In the same asymmetric manner Moldovan authorities speculate on the "nationalist opposition" and their alleged supporters in Romania, however, refrain from speculating on those who are behind the curtains of the Transdnistrian regime. Still they may want to ask themselves: how does Transdnistria manage to survive being under "severe economic blockade" and on top of that manage to always come up with an "appropriate response" to Chisinau's actions? Nonetheless Moldovan authorities refrain from such questions, probably for the fear of some "appropriate actions" that might cost them losing the power.

No doubt the "asymmetric reasoning" stems out of the Communist authorities' preconceived ideas. For instance they openly state "even if Moldovan language would be three times identical to Romanian it would be still called Moldovan for geo-political or ethno-political reasons" (see *Comunistul* of April 13, 2001). That is, the reality is of little importance, what really matters are the interest of the ruling party. Indeed, at the

time the statement was made Communists indented Moldova to join Russia-Belarus Union and to "launch the revival of the Communist movement in the post-soviet space". Those assaults on the sovereignty of the Republic of Moldova (i.e. joining Russia-Belarus Union) are still present in the political document of the ruling Communist Party, which the party is not rushing to cancel. And this despite that at the closing meeting of the summer Parliament session Vladimir Voronin, the President and Chair of the ruling party, indicated that to probe them real politicians had to be careful and not to admit a disparity between words and actions.

Pro Russia-Belarus rhetoric largely employed several years ago was aimed at convincing the main strategic partner, i.e. Russia, to endorse the "asymmetric reasoning" of Chisinau in its relations with Tiraspol. However, Russia assesses its interests according to totally different criteria. It does endorse "asymmetric reasoning", but in a contrary direction, one which is favorable to Tiraspol regime, as is the case of Georgia as well. This is exactly why Moldovan authorities are so critical of the CIS and declare "accession to EU" as their strategic priority. Western diplomats accredited in Chisinau salute the new course of Moldovan authorities, however remind that political component is of extreme importance in the accession process. Unfortunately, the latter has been worsening during the Communist rule. In other words, western diplomats agree with President Voronin when he says that disparity between words and actions should be eliminated. Probably to avoid accusations of inconsistency in enforcing the main party documents and its new strategic objectives, the incumbent ruling party has chosen to be consistent at least in one respect - constantly blaming Romania for undermining Republic of Moldova sovereignty. It is worth mentioning in this respect malicious articles targeted against Romania after the two countries failed to sign the Basic Treaty right on the eve of Prague Summit, not to mention the speculations that it might thwart Romania's accession to NATO.

It would be wrong to believe that everything resumes to "asymmetric reasoning". The sad thing is that there is a pervert or no reasoning at all behind some of the Moldovan authorities' actions. How is Council of Europe's Ministerial Council supposed to react to the invitation to mediate between Republic of Moldova and Romania's bilateral relations? Romania had a clear stance on this. It regrets that the bilateral relations between the two countries were brought up on the international scale. It would be interesting, though, to see how Republic of Moldova would involve the Ministerial Council in mediating on the language in which the Basic Treaty is to be written. Let's see then Moldovan authorities explaining that although there is no difference between Romanian and Moldovan languages, the latter should still be called Moldovan for ethno-political or geo-strategic interests.

Moreover, one may recall that two years ago Moldova was on the verge of a diplomatic scandal during the hearings on the Bessarabian Church in the European Court for Human Rights. One may well recall the outcomes of those actions. Thus, the former Minister of Justice, Ion Morei, who instigated the scandal in the first place, was ousted by the President for several reasons. Presidential press service disclosed that one of them was deteriorating the bilateral relations between Republic of Moldova and Romania via his incriminating speech at the ECHR.

It is worth mentioning that the diplomatic scandal instigated by Alexei Tulbure is undermining first and foremost the policy of good neighborhood relations Moldovan authorities declared to promote. This is the more important given that Moldova is still an extremely weak and vulnerable state and for it to recover a clear and consistent policy is needed. That is, exactly what President Voronin was saying when calling to eliminate the disparity between words and actions, which true in the case of disparity between party documents and strategic goals as well. Pragmatic approach, as authorities like to put it, is very important here. In the last three years of being in power, authorities came up with a dozen of strategies and conceptions on fighting corruption, insurance healthcare, poverty eradication, etc., all of which proved to be worthless. Now it's the European integration strategy, which already turned into a conception. From the prognostic point of view, Romania's experience should not be neglected, especially as it already succeeded a great deal in the aquis communautaire. Having the same language has its advantages especially in assimilating faster this huge experience. But this only the declared goal of accession to EU goes hand in hand with the real goals pursued, whereas "geo-political" considerations (see *Comunistul* of April 13, 2001) do not prevail over realities.

Ideological eclecticism generator of confusion

20 November 2003

A string of recent events are illustrative of Moldovan authorities' political and ideological eclecticism that is generative quite a number of confusions. Even so, in relations with their foreign counterparts, representatives of the incumbent governing choose to set themselves up for being promoters of social-democratic doctrine. And this especially after accession to EU was announced as one of the ruling party's top priorities. The shift in the Communist ideology began once President Vladimir Voronin, also Chair of the ruling party, was cited by the governmental daily *Moldova Suverana* (February 21, 2002) as saying "I don't want to build Communism in Moldova neither a developed socialism. In our times this is an utopia". This statement comes only one year after Communist Party reconfirmed during the 4th Congress held on April 22, 2001 that affiliation to Marxist-Leninist doctrine is its theoretical background and that its major goal is building socialism and communism in the Republic of Moldova.

Communist rhetoric proved to be quite productive domestically. It is very popular with the elderly who have seen nothing but communism in their lives. An illustration to this end, are the messages voiced several weeks ago by the Communist high rank officials, including President Voronin himself, at the 10th anniversary of the restoration of the Communist Party of the Republic of Moldova, as well as at the 86th anniversary of 1917 Bolshevik revolution.

During the ceremony President Voronin tried to answer the question "Who are today's Communists in Moldova? And what is their future?" President's arguments were intended to counteract the dogmatic and "left radicals" of the party, who were accused of "political short-sightedness and naiveness". According to the President, they did not understand that "going back to socialism" via nationalisation of property is impossible, due to the fact that "in the Republic of Moldova almost each citizen has become an owner of private property". Reproaches to the effect that the Communist Party programme lacks a thesis on "dictatorship of the proletariat" were refuted by the following: "What kind of proletariat, what kind of working class are we talking about when the entire industry of the country has been ruined? Only a blind would not see such an obvious thing, i.e. in a very short period even the notion of working class has been totally devalued".

Noteworthy, the "blind and naive" of the Communist Party might be right after all. From a historic perspectives all those who tried to exclude the basic thesis from the Marxist-Leninist practice were called opportunists and revisionists. Moreover, the most important thesis defined by Marx refers to Feuerbach. The most famous one: "Philosophers sought to explain differently the world, our task is to change it". Having said that, President Voronin is rather a philosopher trying to explain why it is dangerous to re-nationalise private property, or why the proletariat and working class had degraded in the Republic of Moldova. "Naives" believe that a true Marxist leader would have to change the state of affairs, especially when he has all the power to do it. Otherwise, it would be honest for him to relinquish Marxist-Leninist rhetoric, conduct the much-promised reform in the party and adopt an appropriate political program.

Apparently what President Voronin calls an "utopia" brings forward electoral and political gains, even if it generates all kinds of curiosities and confusions as well.

For instance, according to some official estimates almost half a million of Moldovan citizens are true proletariats, however they are working abroad. Governmental agencies are negotiating with similar agencies abroad to legalise the export of work force from the Republic of Moldova. Therefore one may say that working class of the Republic of Moldova has become an extremely profitable export item ensuring the economic growth, which Moldovan authorities like to brag about for propaganda purposes.

Naturally, a Communist party should have taken a raft of measures to repatriate its working class, whose interests they claim to represent. For this to happen policies aimed at attracting foreign investments are necessary, as well as opportunities for their employment should be provided.

Those shifts in ideology have lead to some curiosities lately. On the one hand, Communist faction in Parliament signed together with opposition factions a statement featuring European integration as a top priority, on the other hand party press praises nationalisation of companies, party efforts to fight privatisation programs and contest property rights on land. However, it is known for a fact that one of the fundamental requirements for EU accession is a viable market economy. It remains to be seen how the Communist Party would contribute to a functional market economy via its political programme based on Marxist-Leninist theory.

Another curiosity, while Communist newspaper was praising its Chinese counterparts for taking the path of reforms in the Marxist-Leninist spirit, international press featured the statement of the Chair of the State Property Commission of China, Li Rongrong. The statement reads that at the recent party plenary session a decision was taken on the privatisation of state companies. Further, the privatisation results would not be subject to any revision, whereas foreign companies would be allowed to hold the majority stake in privatised companies. Evidently, state would maintain control over the companies of strategic importance for the state security. It remains to be seen how Marxist-Leninist principles would be employed in explaining the aforesaid revolutionary events.

Memorandum on principles of establishing a unified state

25 November 2003

Kremlin administration's initiative on basic principles of the unified state has all the chances to be in centre of public attention of Moldova for quite a while. Both political figures and analysts agree that two factors determined the release of the Memorandum: upcoming OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Maastricht and not less important upcoming parliamentary elections in the Republic of Moldova.

a) Maastricht factor

Noteworthy, last year on the eve of OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Porto mediators made public another initiative on the establishment of "a contractual federation" between the Republic of Moldova and Transdnistria. The initiative was backed up by the mediator countries, i.e. Russia and Ukraine, as well as by OSCE and Transdnistria. Apparently, this time Kremlin decided not to repeat last year mistake when the document entitled "statement of intentions" was submitted to Moldovan authorities one day prior to the Porto Summit. Kremlin therefore failed to convince Moldovan authorities to accept the idea of "contractual federation". Furthermore, Moldovan Foreign Minister addressed international community at the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting warning on the threat posed by Transdnistrian regime to the security in the region, which exists mainly due to smuggling of munitions, drugs, and human beings.

This year, however, Kremlin decided to go on its own, by-passing the pentagonal mediation mechanism, thus submitting the Memorandum to their Moldovan counterparts several weeks in advance so as to secure enough time to convince Moldovan side to accept the document. According to other opinions, Moldovan side co-operated with their Russian counterparts right from the beginning in drafting the Memorandum and failed to notify either Ukraine or OSCE. All in all, it seems Moldovan side will be the one to justify at the Maastricht Summit "Russia's failure to evacuate its troops from the soil of the Republic of Moldova".

An evidence to this effect is the fact that immediately Memorandum was released, President Vladimir Putin himself clearly stated that Russia would honour its engagement to withdraw the munitions and troops from Transdnistria, only after Memorandum is accepted and implemented. Noteworthy, once both Moldova and Transdnistria accept the Memorandum, other parties to the pentagonal mechanism: Ukraine and OSCE holding on to the principle "we accept any formula of the conflict resolution that is acceptable to the conflicting parties" would accept it as well. Nevertheless, OSCE and the Republic of Moldova publicly expressed their lingering concerns with regard to the Memorandum.

b) Electoral factor

Indeed, electoral factor would play a key role in the Memorandum's acceptance by Moldovan authorities. Right now, Republic of Moldova ruling party has found itself in a quite delicate situation. Firstly, albeit the economic growth reported by official statistics three years in a row, economists, including those of the Communist faction, believe Moldovan economy is in pre-infarct state. Skyrocketed prices on energy and food have stymied social policies announced by the ruling party. When it comes to ideology Communist Party has shifted towards opportunism and revisionism, which in the long run might impair their ideological attractiveness. Out of all electoral promises made, ruling party has delivered only one - it revised local public administration system. The impact of the said revision in terms of boosting local government effectiveness is rather questionable. One may rightly claim that the only benefit produced by the said reform resumed to edifying a "vertical power", which is to be employed by the ruling party in pulling "administrative resources" in the upcoming elections.

Since it decided to wield heavy pressure, Communist ruling has suffered a number of painful defeats in its relations with Transdnistria. The "economic blockade" supinely endorsed by Russia and Ukraine has lead to a considerable drop in bilateral trade between Chisinau and Tiraspol, Moldovan goods being totally replaced on Transdnistrian market by Russian or Ukrainian ones. Moldova also lost the telephonic war it had started against Transdnistria. Moreover, Tiraspol accepted President Voronin's call to stop the war on one condition, i.e. a bilateral agreement is to be signed by the parties, whereby undertaking to refrain from such measures in the future. This condition resembles a proposition to sign a "capitulation act" at the end of a lost telephonic war.

Under those circumstances, the last-ditch for the incumbent ruling party and its Chairperson would be to go in the next elections as "country unifiers".

In this respect we should mention that making concessions in conflict settlement has become already tradition in Moldova, especially on the eve of elections. In 1996 Petru Lucinski at that time Parliament Speaker build his electoral campaign around blaming President Mircea Snegur for instigating the bloodshed conflict, rather than the separatist regime. Later, on May 8, 1997 Lucinski signed a Memorandum, thereby granting Transdnistria equal rights to Moldova in the negotiation process, as well as the right to pursue its own foreign trade.

After its victory in 2001 elections, conflicts remained to be the best tune of the Communist Party. For instance last year, after instigating a political scandal in Comrat that ousted Bashkan Dumitru Croitor, to promote their protege Communists promised to raise the legal status of Gagauz-Yeri, thereby enabling it to break away from Moldova under certain circumstances. It is true that later on they gave up that promise. This year also, on the eve of elections to Peoples' Assembly Gagauz-Yeri was promised the status of a federation subject in the would-be Moldovan federation.

Bilateral relations with Tiraspol evolved along the same scenario. Soon after he had declared Transdnistrian conflict resolution as one of his top priorities, President Voronin discovered that breakaway leaders took the provisions of the 1997

Memorandum providing for equality of the parties equality, rather seriously. President Voronin wielded heavy pressure on the Tiraspol regime, which as mentioned above has failed. Under given circumstances, when there is one year left until elections, authorities have nothing but to follow the old tradition and make concessions. This time concessions are made under the cover of the so-called "asymmetric federation", which President Voronin wanted so badly.

c) Possible outcomes

Under Kremlin's Memorandum the representation of Gagauz-Yeri (4 Senate mandates per 100,000 citizens with the right to vote) and Transdnistria (9 mandates per 400,000 citizens) in the Senate, the most important institution of the would-be federation, would be 7 and 4 times higher than that of Chisinau (13 mandates per 2,400,000 citizens). Having said that, would anybody dare say that the proposed federation is not asymmetric!

Secondly, the draft Memorandum provides for a ten-year transition period, wherein asymmetry would be applied not only in Senate representation, but also in decision-making, i.e. by a majority of 3/4 out of the total number of mandates. Therefore, Tiraspol on its own would be able to veto any legal act, and this even without Gagauz-Yeri. However, this time asymmetry would work against Chisinau. Moreover, senators would be entitled to an imperative mandate, i.e. Transdnistria and Gagauz representatives shall vote as Tiraspol and respectively Comrat chooses to, otherwise risking to be recalled and replaced with others, more loyal to the cause pursued by the relevant subjects. Those are some additional measures aimed at ensuring the much-wanted asymmetry.

Thirdly, throughout transition, federation subjects would preserve their own state institutions, whereas all the shocks of transitions would be attributed to the so-called "federal territory", i.e. what remains of the Republic of Moldova. The latter would have to take the blow and experience the effects of state structural reforms enforced within the framework of an unprecedented model Russian experts came up with. Moldovan authorities are already known for their ability to promote reforms, the more so as the state structure proposed by the Russian Federation is unique. Moreover, the latter is to comprise elements that were in open confrontation during the last 15 years. Viewed from this perspective, Moscow's compromise variant on the one hand enables Chisinau to use the adjective *asymmetric* against such a noun as *federation*, and on the other, guarantees Transdnistria and Gagauz statehood and on top of that entitles them to decide on internal matters of the "federal territory".

And last but not least, the 12 years of independence have proved that in Moldova nothing is more stable than transition. The prerogatives Tiraspol and Comrat are to receive would allow them to decide on how long transition is to last on the federal territory, it may well happen that it would last until asymmetric federation would have totally discredited itself. And this because federal structures wouldn't have any control mechanism over the federation subjects, as the law enforcement forces would exist as separate units. Indeed, Chisinau would be entitled to one lever - each time to appeal to the Memorandum authors in Moscow asking them to interfere and pursue federation

subjects to comply with the Memorandum provisions. However, such a mechanism is far from being appropriate to a sovereign and independent state.

The aforesaid might spur dissatisfaction among the public and might also worsen off the political stability in the country. One may not underestimate negative attitudes of the population towards a federation with a regime, labelled by the official propaganda as a "criminal and Mafia type". Citizens may rightly wonder whether authorities lied them when they had labelled Tiraspol regime as a criminal one, and if so, then why they had entered in a game with separatists in the first place.

In addition, we should not forget that at the moment there is only one strategic objective that might consolidate the society, namely the Strategy of European Integration. This was confirmed in the President Voronin address to European Union back in 2002 as well as in the Joint Declaration of the three Parliament factions (ruling party and opposition parties alike) signed on November 14 confirming their cohesiveness in pursuing European integration.

A quick look at the Memorandum would suffice to understand that it is far from being able to consolidate the society. Its implementation, as well as military guarantees propositions that followed, undermine the pursuit of European integration strategic goal. Moreover it does no good to the image the country projects abroad, when it agrees to solutions running counter to the publicly stated goal of European integration.

All this because the conflict resolution plan is unilateral, as it comes from a power directly involved in the conflict and promoting its own strategic interests, as well as the interests of Russian citizens who usurped the power on a portion of Republic of Moldova territory. Those interests are quite different from those of the Republic of Moldova. The biased attitude of the Memorandum authors has been disclosed by the proposed federation formula that envisages an asymmetry unfavourable and discriminatory towards the Republic of Moldova. Moreover, Tiraspol has reiterated on numerous occasions that Transdnistria is a "Russian land". Therefore we should not even dream of Russia's full support in our European integration efforts, as it promoted the Memorandum and has been the main guarantor of its enforcement

And those are just a few of the risks Republic of Moldova exposes itself to, once it accepts the Memorandum.

Would CEC preserve its independence?

22 December 2003

On December 16 Central Electoral Commission's six year mandate expired. Although under Moldova law CEC members could hold two mandates at most, Moldovan authorities chose to replace its entire membership. This radical change does not run counter to the law, however it raises eyebrows.

Firstly, the replacement of the entire CEC membership undermines one of the cornerstone principles employed when the Electoral Code had been drafted back in 1997, namely ensuring the continuity of the CEC activity. Continuity was to be ensured via a gradual replacement of the CEC membership, and that is exactly why the mechanism of two consecutive mandates was provided for. It was recommended by certain international organisations working in the electoral field, such as International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) and Association of Central and Eastern European Election Officials (ACEEEO). However due to the shortage of funding, Moldovan authorities accepted only partially the recommendations, thereby establishing a CEC with only 3 out of 9 members working on a permanent basis, i.e. Chairman, Deputy Chairman and Secretary, the other six being summoned only during electoral campaigns. During those six years both ACEEEO and other international organisations have made significant investments in the Moldovan CEC, by accepting it as a full-rights member, providing it with research and conference publications, exempting it from the membership fee.

This investment proved to be worthwhile especially if judging based on the OSCE reports on monitoring elections. On the other hand, it is also true that the old CEC made mistakes and passed decisions that raised harsh criticism. An illustration to this effect was the decision to validate the results of a consultative referendum on replacing the existing form of governing with a presidential one held back in 1999. CEC decision back in 1999 indeed favoured President Lucinski who initiated the referendum in the first place. The thing was that the voter turnout was only 58.5%, and not 60% as was required by the law. Back then, CEC argued its decision by invoking a rather vague wording of the law, which in their opinion only recommended and not imposed the 60% voter turnout threshold. Another example of a quite controversial decision was CEC' last year refusal to register an initiative group calling on a consultative so as to assess whether citizens were in favour of joining EU and NATO. CEC decision was quite stunning due to the arguments cited, under the constitutional law citizens may not be preliminary consulted on issues that require the conduct of a constitutional referendum for a decision to be taken. In both cases it was quite obvious that CEC acted under the pressure wielded by the incumbent ruling that were pursuing their own interests.

Although the examples cited above point to the fact that political meddling has had an impact on the CEC activity, it should be mentioned that those controversial decisions of the CEC were confirmed by the Supreme Court of Justice and Constitutional Court. Still the old CEC was characterised by a pluralism of opinion, fact that brought an added value and a progress in the electoral process. This fact was cited by the President of the country who had to thank the old CEC for its high professionalism, which was praised alike by the international institutions working in the electoral field.

Having said that, we may conclude that the old CEC was professional only when free of any pressure. Therefore, in order to improve the electoral process in the Republic of Moldova a mechanism should be found, which would thwart any attempt to wield heavy influence and that would build on the positive experience acquired. Moldovan authorities, however, chose another path, that is, to ignore the 6 year experience acquired.

The second cornerstone principle employed in drafting the Electoral Code had been the impartiality of CEC members. To ensure CEC's impartiality, it was provided for that Parliament, Presidency, and Supreme Magistracy Council shall designate each 3 members into the CEC. Back in 1997 those 3 institutions represented a broader spectrum or interests, which often ran counter or even zeroed each other, however nowadays those 3 institutions represent one single interest, that of the Communist Party. In this respect it is worth mentioning that Communist majority did not even go into the trouble of consulting the opposition factions when it came up with the 3 candidates for CEC. The fact that judiciary in general and Supreme Magistracy Council in particular are under the governing control has been largely commented upon in the last two years, that is why we may rightly have some doubts about the candidates designated by this institution. And last but not least, last local elections were illustrative to the fact that the Presidency acted more like an electoral agent of the ruling party than a public institution. Indeed in his capacity as the President of the country, Vladimir Voronin, interfered in the electoral campaign by openly electioneering in favour of the Communist Party. We have further reasons to doubt if considering that one of the 3 persons designated by the President to the CEC is no one but the Chief of the control department over the enforcement of President orders. This new member of the CEC came to be known in the last elections when he served as Communist Party representative to the Chisinau electoral council. One week prior to his designation to CEC he published an article in the "Communistul" newspaper reporting on how well he had guarded Communist party's interests throughout the campaign. Based on the report, he was indeed an earnest guard of the Communist Party interests, fact which normally would disqualify him as a candidate to CEC, who should be first and foremost politically impartial. In this case however, on the contrary his service to the Communist Party was repaid fully by him being appointed as the Secretary of the CEC.

Albeit Electoral Code provisions that CEC members may not be party members, it wasn't an obstacle for politicising the Commission. Formally, the membership in the Communist Party may be suspended; however it is still questionable whether such a formal measure would take over the party discipline or the gratitude for being promoted. That is why, opposition parties face a new challenge now, reconsidering the principles ensuring CEC impartiality. Otherwise one may not dream of free and fair elections in the Republic of Moldova in the near future. And this especially as the last OSCE report pointed to the fact that Moldovan authorities undermine free and fair elections when it comes to influencing their final outcome.